

WEEK 8: THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA - THE LUKEWARM CHURCH

The New Testament does not record anything about the founding of the church at Laodicea. However, like most of the other six churches, it was likely established during Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). The city of Laodicea was one of a triad of cities with Colossae and Hierapolis and was the southernmost of the seven cities. It lay about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia and 90 miles east of Ephesus.

Laodicea was a wealthy town that was known as a strategic banking center. They used their own wealth to pay for the reconstruction of the city after a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60, rejecting offers of financial aid from Rome. The city was also famous for the soft, black wool it produced and its ancient medicine, particularly an eye salve. All three industries – finance, wool, and eye salve – came into play in this letter. Laodicea's water supply was also relevant to the message in this letter as the water had to travel several miles through an underground aqueduct before reaching the city. Therefore, the water arrived foul, dirty, and tepid – lukewarm, just like the people in the church.¹

As you study this letter, ask God to speak to your heart through the message to the church at Laodicea.

DAY 1: THE DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST AND OVERVIEW

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:14-22

1. How does this letter differ from the previous six letters? What is not included in this letter that is found in the other six?

2. What do the titles, "the Amen" and "the faithful and true Witness" signify in verse 14?

¹ MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Revelation*, 135- 136.

3. How do these verses give clarity to those titles?

Isaiah 65:16

John 14:6

2 Corinthians 1:20

Revelation 19:11

4. The NASB reads that He is the “Beginning of the creation of God.” What insight do these verses give to help you understand the meaning of that phrase?

John 1:1-3

Colossians 1:15-18

Hebrews 1:2

II. Looking Upward

5. In what situations of life are you most encouraged by His faithfulness and truth?

6. If you truly rested in God’s faithfulness and truth, how would that impact your life?

III. Looking Deeper

This is not the first time we read about the church at Laodicea. What do we know about this church from these verses?

Colossians 2:1

Colossians 4:12-17

IV. Looking Reflectively

We can always rest in God's faithfulness and truth, regardless of our life situation.

Spend some time today worshipping Him for these attributes. Meditate on Lamentations 3:22-23. Personalize this verse to your own life.

DAY 2: THE CONCERN

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:15-17

1. Describe this church.
2. What insight does verse 17 give us concerning the state of the church?
3. What is He implying by the term "lukewarm"?
4. Why would God prefer that they (and we) be either hot or cold, but not lukewarm?

II. Looking Upward

5. How would you recognize a lukewarm individual or church?

6. The Laodicean church was guilty of self-sufficiency. In what areas of your life do you lean toward self-sufficiency instead of looking to Christ's sufficiency?

III. Looking Deeper

When He describes them as "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked," what is He referring to?

How does the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22 relate to this church?

IV. Looking Reflectively

There is always the tendency to rely on our own sufficiency and believe we can handle things on our own. God continues to put me in situations where He shows me I am insufficient. I don't like to be reminded of it, but it is so necessary. My tendency is to want to take care of things myself and not have to depend on someone else. Jesus Christ wants us to depend on Him. When I don't, I am frustrated and fruitless. When I do, I find it so encouraging and uplifting to see His power in my weakness. He gently reminds me that yes, He is enough. He is sufficient.

Jesus Christ alone is our sufficiency. Do you live as if that is true?

Take some time today to reflect on your life and ask God to show you an area in which you are depending on self or others or things for your sufficiency instead of Christ.

Are you lukewarm, hot, or cold in your relationship with the Lord today?

DAY 3: THE COUNSEL

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:18

1. What three things does He advise them to “buy” from Him and why?
2. Instead of real gold, they should buy “gold refined by fire.” What does that mean? (Look at Luke 12:21, 1 Timothy 6:17, and James 2:5 to prompt your thinking.)
3. Instead of the black garments popular in Laodicea, they were to “buy from Me white garments.” According to Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 7:9-11 and 19:7-8, what does He mean?
4. What is He alluding to with the “eye salve to anoint your eyes so you may see”? (Look also at Acts 26:15-18, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, and Ephesians 1:18-19.)

II. Looking Upward

5. Is He talking to believers or nonbelievers here? Explain your answer.
6. How can you “buy” gold refined by fire, white garments, and eye salve in the way Christ meant?

III. Looking Deeper

How does Isaiah 55:1-3 relate to His message to the church at Laodicea?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Look to Jesus as the source of life and fulfillment, not worldly things that have no eternal value.

We are all in danger of putting our trust in the wrong things for fulfillment and satisfaction in life. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to do that?

DAY 4: THE COMMAND

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:19-20

1. What are some possible reasons why He interjects "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline" at this point in the letter? How is it related to what He was just saying and is about to say?

2. Is Revelation 3:20 a gospel invitation to come to Christ or an invitation to intimate fellowship with Him? Is this verse directed to an individual or to the church; to unbelievers or believers or both? Explain your answer.

3. What does Jesus mean that He "will dine (or eat) with him, and he with Me"?

II. Looking Upward

4. How do reproof and discipline play a role in loving someone? (See also Hebrews 12:6-11.)

5. In Revelation 3:19, why is it necessary for them to be “zealous” (NASB) or “earnest” (NIV) along with repentance in their situation?

III. Looking Deeper

Read Ezekiel 18:30-32

What instructions does God give Israel concerning their sin and why?

What do you learn about God from this passage and how does it relate to the church at Laodicea?

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ.”²

How do you view repentance?

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 2:248.

Jesus desires intimate fellowship with us.

Is your relationship with Christ growing in intimacy, or is He standing outside, waiting for you to involve Him in your life? Do you desire intimate fellowship with Him; and if so, how are you bringing it about?

DAY 5: THE PROMISE

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:21-22

1. What does it mean that the overcomer (or believer) will sit down with Him on His throne? (See also Luke 22:28-30, Romans 8:16-17, and Revelation 20:4-6.)

2. What insight do these verses give concerning Jesus overcoming and being seated with the Father on His throne?

Hebrews 1:1-4

Hebrews 8:1

Hebrews 12:2

3. Even though this promise will be fulfilled in the future, how does it give us hope in the challenges and stresses of life today?

II. Looking Upward

4. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of the church in the world today and why?

5. What lessons can we learn from the church at Laodicea that would make us more effective?

6. We are instructed to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” What would hinder you from listening to the Spirit and the messages to these seven churches?

III. Looking Deeper

Paul prayed for this church years before this letter was written to the Laodicean church. What does he pray for them according to Colossians 2:1-3?

How is this church doing in relation to what Paul prayed for them years earlier?

IV. Looking Reflectively

I long for the day when I will see Jesus face to face and will be free from the power of sin. I long for the day when we will see Him sitting on the throne and we will bow down at His feet to worship Him. I don't want to disappoint Him, although I know I already have in so many ways. How grateful I am that He is a God who is merciful and forgives and gives us a second (and third and fourth...) chance. He offers us great hope for the future. In the meantime, as we continue our struggle on this earth in our fleshly bodies, let us press on to obedience out of love; let us take to heart the admonitions and exhortations to the seven churches of Revelation. If you sense that you are growing apathetic or lukewarm in your love for the Lord and commitment to Him, acknowledge it and allow Him to “rekindle the fire” in your heart.

Spend some time today reflecting on this study and how God has most spoken to you through these letters to the seven churches.